

The Emotional Experience and Perceived Changes in Siblings of Children With Cancer Reported During a Group Intervention

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Purpose/Objectives: To examine the experiences and perceived changes in siblings of children with cancer while participating in a group intervention program.

Research Approach: Repeated observations during group participation and content analysis.

Setting: A tertiary pediatric health center in Ontario, Canada.

Participants: Twenty-two siblings (aged 7–18 years) of children with cancer.

Methodologic Approach: Siblings participated in the Siblings Coping Together program, an eight-week group intervention designed for this population. Data consisted of materials completed by siblings (49 homework sheets, 33 pieces of artwork), and 31 logs recording events within group sessions.

Findings: Three categories emerged from the data: (a) siblings' emotional experience (related to cancer, their affected brother or sister, and the family), (b) siblings' role change (increased responsibility; becoming a caregiver, helper, and entertainer for the ill child), and (c) changes during the eight-week group intervention (bonding with other siblings; increased participation, trust, and interactions; increased coping strategies).

Conclusions: These findings provide rich insight into siblings' own views of changes in themselves and within the family, as well as the perceived benefits of group participation.

Interpretation: Methodologically, this study demonstrated that the inclusion of visual materials as data is a valid methodology for future research. Clinically, these findings can help nurses in their daily care of children with cancer and their families.

A diagnosis of childhood cancer and its treatment is a devastating experience for the ill child, parents, and siblings, and it can lead to psychological difficulties (Alderfer et al., 2010; Prchal & Landolt, 2012). Siblings have reported a reduction of parental attention (Chesler, Allswede, & Barbarin, 1992; Freeman, O'Dell, & Meola, 2000; Sargent et al., 1995; Sloper, 2000); missing parents and the ill child when apart (Havermans & Eiser, 1994; Prchal & Landolt, 2012); a sense of jealousy, anger, and loneliness (Chesler et al., 1992; Dolgin, Somer, Zaidel, & Zaizov, 1997; Havermans & Eiser, 1994; Sloper, 2000); and a loss of a family way of life (Woodgate, 2006). Siblings have also reported feeling worried (Nolbris, Enskär, & Hellström, 2007) and guilty for the illness (Bendor, 1990). These experiences and emotional responses may lead to psychological maladjustment in a subgroup of siblings (Alderfer et al., 2010; Alderfer, Labay, & Kazak, 2003; Kaplan, Kaal, Bradley, & Alderfer, 2013; Sidhu, Passmore, & Baker, 2006). Combined, these studies suggest a need for developing preventive interventions targeting the psychosocial difficulties of siblings of children with cancer. Systematic reviews of the literature have reached similar conclusions (Barlow & Ellard, 2006; Houtzager, Grootenhuis, & Last, 1999; Packman, Weber,